



United States Mission to the OSCE

On Events in South Ossetia

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
August 14, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate very much that you scheduled this special session of the Permanent Council, and express our full support for the joint efforts of the Chairman-in-Office, Special Envoy Talvitie, and the European Union to resolve this crisis. We deeply regret the loss of life caused by this conflict, including the senseless civilian casualties, and our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families.

Mr. Chairman, the United States continues to be deeply concerned by the recent events in Georgia, when Russian forces moved beyond the zone of conflict in South Ossetia, overran the city of Gori, and attacked military installations near Tbilisi. We also continue to be concerned by reports that in the same period, Russian troops moved beyond Abkhazia to the port of Poti and the city of Senaki. We are gravely concerned by reports of ethnic cleansing of Georgians in South Ossetia, and we urge the OSCE to investigate these and any other claims of such abuses.

The aggressive military actions of the Russian Federation were completely out of proportion to events in South Ossetia and went beyond any reasonable steps to ensure the safety of civilians and peacekeepers, escalating to open hostilities with Georgia. Russia's actions represented a dramatic and brutal escalation of the conflict and were inconsistent with assurances that its objectives were limited to restoring the status quo ante that existed before fighting began August 6.

Russian military action was also inconsistent with Russia's peacekeeping role under the 1994 Moscow Agreement and with commitments made in Istanbul and under Article II of the UN Charter, which calls for all UN members to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.

In our view, Russia acted outside international law and must be considered a party to the conflict. It invaded a sovereign neighboring state and threatened a democratic government duly elected by its people. We strongly condemn Russia's actions, and we deplore the casualties and physical damage that resulted from the re-emergence of armed conflict on European soil. Russia's actions this week raised serious questions about its intentions in Georgia and the region. These actions have damaged substantially Russia's standing in the world and jeopardized Russia's relations with the United States and other countries.

The United States welcomes the ceasefire mediated by the French President on behalf of the European Union. We strongly urge the full cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of those Russian military forces introduced after initiation of the current conflict from Georgian territory and a return to the military status quo as of August 6. We urge Russia to demonstrate respect for Georgia's territorial integrity. We reaffirm our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within internationally recognized borders.

We note the current diplomatic efforts taking place in Moscow and Tbilisi and urge the parties to put in place a lasting cease-fire and reach a political solution to the conflict that ensures Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty. A safe and secure humanitarian assistance corridor for the victims of these tragic events should be immediately established. We urge Russia to allow food, fuel, and humanitarian aid to reach civilians throughout the Caucasus.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to express again our full support for the joint efforts of the Chairman-in-Office and the European Union to resolve this crisis. The United States will work with the international community to ensure Georgia has all the assistance it needs to meet immediate humanitarian needs and, over the longer term, to rebuild its country and repair the damage done by recent assaults.

We support fully the continued work of the OSCE Mission to Georgia and believe the OSCE can play a key role in further mediation, monitoring, and humanitarian work. We applaud the efforts of Foreign Minister Stubb and call on OSCE Secretary General de Brichambaut, Ambassador Salber, and Ambassador Hakala to develop and implement an OSCE plan that helps facilitate the delivery of international humanitarian assistance where OSCE can add value to efforts underway. The OSCE as a promoter of peace and stability must respond immediately to the needs of the victims of this tragedy.

In practical terms, we urge continued joint OSCE-EU involvement in negotiations to reach a lasting solution to this conflict. We encourage consideration of enhanced OSCE border control activities and approval for an immediate increase in the number of OSCE Mission Monitoring Officers in South Ossetia. We also urge consideration of EU proposals to send EU peacekeepers to the region.

We believe these are practical steps the OSCE can take to help resolve this conflict. We urge the OSCE and our Chairman-in-Office to implement them immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.